



MME. MARIA PIETZCKER

Around about the turn of the century Maria Grober was born in Klagenfurt, the second city of Austria. Home was a large establishment on the main city square. Her father was a, if not, the leading gynaecologist and obstetrician of the city. Maria had the upbringing and education and enjoyed the lifestyle of the youngest child of an upper class family of the day. Whilst opera, concerts and ballet were a rich part of her life, she was also schooled, chiefly by her mother, in the management of a large house with a full complement of servants. She never forgot this extensive training in knowing every job properly so as to be able to supervise others and was often able in later years to fall back on this experience to her advantage. She had the fondest memories of childhood and the lifestyle in World War I Vienna. An early marriage dignified by the Bishop in her own home did not last.

Her travels and inquiring mind brought her to Australia in the 1930's. She quickly found her social niche in Melbourne. During the pre war (WWII) period she successfully supplemented her income, and kept busy, by supplying accessories to couturiers and boutiques and to soft furnishers for the carriage trade. World War II was, of course, an especial personal tragedy for her, separated from family and friends and presumed hostile by her adopted country. In the style we all later came to greatly respect, she did not report to the local policeman as required but he reported to her, enticed by coffee and cognac into this minor variation of procedure.

During the war years she was involved with the assembly of some meticulous munitions production, and quickly introduced several important innovations to the production line procedures. The post war years saw her involved with the production of toys and the marketing of herbs from her own herb farm. The latter was an entirely novel idea as the use of herbs did not then have the wide acceptance it does today. In the early fifties she married John Pietzcker, the Vice-Consul for Switzerland, thus acquiring the

"Mme" which stuck for the remainder of her years. John Pietzcker died in the early sixties, and at this time the association between the Institute and Maria Pietzcker began. After John

Pietzcker's death she looked for challenging work and accepted the

invitation to organise and operate the glassware service

for the new steroid chromatography section of the then Ionic Research Laboratory.

This laboratory was making the attempt at accurate and specific measurement of amounts of steroid hormones, as small as a

thousand millionth of a gram and the glassware side of the

issue was as crucial, in some ways more so, than any other. She soon

had this operating perfectly and

routinely, and was then asked to direct her attention to some weaknesses in our surgical organisation. Here the contact with clinical issues of her early years soon became evident. The equipment side was quickly mastered and kept in perfect shape. Maria then became a highly efficient surgical assistant especially to Prof. R.D. Wright, a role she continued for many years. Consequently, when the new building for the Institute was contemplated, she designed the central surgical supply and surgical theatres - including a personal survey of such facilities in Europe. This she did, as well as providing many of the most up to date equipment and instruments at her own expense. Her philosophy was that as an honorary worker in the Institute she was bound to do everything perfectly - which she did.

When eventually she retired from running the Central Supply and as a surgical assistant, the Institute commissioned a Meszaros Medal and named the Surgical Suite in her honour. She retired to her splendid garden property at Research. When she died it was in first class order, and we found she had bequeathed it to the Institute - our first major endowment. She was an idealist in her standard of service to the Institute and her attitude to scientific standards. The Board has decided to perpetuate her memory by using the income from the bequest to support a Maria Pietzcker Endowment Fund.

